

The report outlines in painstaking detail the mass human rights abuses that innocent civilians must endure from both the Russian-backed Syrian offensive and terrorist groups like ISIS.

Hospitals are deliberately targeted—33 in Aleppo alone—resulting in mass civilian casualties. In blatant disregard of core human rights law, starvation has systematically been used as a weapon of war.

Over 450,000 people are currently trapped in besieged towns and villages in Syria, and thousands are at risk of starving to death.

Schools and playgrounds and other public spaces are routinely shelled to inflict the maximum amount of terror on innocent civilians. The report tells of attacks on a girls school in Duma, where 19 civilians were killed. Even though there were no military objectives, government forces attacked the school twice, the second attack taking place during first aid evacuation efforts.

Last month Secretary Kerry helped negotiate a temporary, 2-week cease-fire with Russia that was supposed to end the fighting and allow for the delivery of aid to besieged towns.

Unfortunately, like the deal we struck with Russia on Assad's use of chemical weapons, this cease-fire merely locks in the gains achieved by the Assad regime and gives Russia outsized influence in shaping the future of the Middle East. Regardless, the terms of the agreement were almost immediately violated.

Any hope of a sustained peace was dashed this week with the almost-immediate and predictable breach of the cease-fire agreement.

On Sunday, the Syrian opposition released a letter documenting violations of the cease-fire agreement by the Assad regime, Russia, and Iranian-backed militia, which I will include in the RECORD.

FEBRUARY 28, 2016.

H.E. Mr. BAN KI-MOON,
*Secretary-General,
United Nations, New York.*

EXCELLENCY SECRETARY-GENERAL: I regret to inform you that hostilities committed by Russian, Iranian, the Syrian regime, and foreign militias and mercenaries allied to them have continued against the Syrian people despite the truce taking effect on the 27th February 2016.

Right from the onset of the truce, a large number of violations have been committed by the regime and its allies in several parts of Syria. The regime has continued to target populated areas using helicopter raids to deploy explosive barrels, resulting in a large number of fatalities and causing significant injuries, most of whom were innocent women and children. There were seven recorded incidents of such breach. Furthermore, there have been twenty-four recorded breaches involving artillery shelling and five incidents recording offensive ground operations. Recorded breaches of the truce were registered in twenty-six different areas held by the moderate opposition.

Moreover, today, Sunday 28th February, Russian fighter jets launched twenty-six air strikes against territory held by opposition

groups which have announced and entered into the truce. Disturbingly significant is the fact that cluster bombs as well as thermobaric weapons were deployed, adding to the number of innocent civilian fatalities and horrifying injuries.

In light of repeated breaches by the regime and its allies since the commencement of the truce, the growing number of fatalities, which currently stands at twenty-nine documented deaths, in addition to the dozens who have been injured as indiscriminate targeting of populated areas continues, we wish to clarify the following:

It is most unfortunate that the Russian Ministry of Defense presented an erroneous map riddled with false military information (<http://youtu.be/MaYvEidSzsSent>) and attributed this map to the United Nations for calculated political and military purposes, as purported areas of political influence and distribution of forces on Syrian territory. The sole purpose of that exercise was to exclude certain areas from the truce and to continue their systematic bombardment and forced displacement. Given the serious consequences of these violations on the Syrian people and on the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, we urge that you take the necessary measures to respond and counter false Russian allegations and put a stop to such practices.

We call on the United Nations and the Friends of Syria Group to be mandated to specify the territory covered by the truce to prevent hostilities in the designated inclusion zones, such a task must be assumed by an impartial and transparent party. We also note that the absence of clear separation lines will result in the targeting of civilian populated areas by the regime and its allies, and henceforth constitute yet another flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions jeopardizing the truce.

Although the Syrian opposition groups have demonstrated maximum levels of self-restraint and have thus far continued to adhere to their obligations to the truce, it seems likely that the regime and its allies' persistent crimes against the Syrian people will inevitably undermine international efforts for the continuation of the truce.

We have agreed to the temporary truce as a response to sincere international efforts aiming to ease the suffering of the Syrian people and to assist in the implementation of the humanitarian provisions of UNSCR 2254, in particular: articles 12, 13 and 14. Failure to achieve any significant progress in this regard will leave us no option but to examine alternative measures to ensure the protection of the Syrian people and bring an end to the crimes committed against them. It is therefore of critical importance for the Security Council to stand firm and unwavering in its resolve.

The persistent violations of the regime and the forces allied to it will undermine Security Council efforts for a political process, including the most recent, UNSCR 2268. It is abhorrent to pursue a political process through which the suffering of the Syrian people is used as a means to achieve political and military gains; under such circumstances, negotiations will be unfeasible.

Excelsency Secretary-General, the gravity of the situation, and the consequent clear and direct threat to peace and security at a regional and international level, require the United Nations to intervene immediately, to stop the crimes committed against the Syrian people and to preserve the unity and integrity of Syria.

Yours respectfully,

DR. RIAD HIJAB,
*Coordinator General, The High
Negotiations Committee.*

Mrs. BROOKS of Indiana. These violations discussed in this letter are com-

prised of barrel and cluster bomb attacks and a number of ground incursions against opposition groups who had entered into the truce.

In the first 2 days alone, there were more than 29 documented deaths, mostly of women and children, and dozens of injuries. This is during the alleged cease-fire.

Some believe that this far-off conflict isn't affecting communities across America. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to say they are wrong.

I routinely meet with Syrian Americans in Indiana who share stories of the devastation their loved ones are experiencing back in their homeland. Listening to them recount the struggles of their families reminds me that, if we are to adhere to our values as a Nation, we must defend the vulnerable and expand basic human liberty.

Standing idly by as bombs rain down on hospitals or as Assad uses starvation as a method of warfare is an abdication of what we stand for as a Nation, but that is exactly what we have done.

This President's insistence on diminishing American power abroad has empowered Putin to step into the leadership vacuum, has bolstered Assad in Syria, and has prolonged the conflict.

We must not succumb to difficulty. We must take a stand and start meaningfully engaging our allies and strengthen the moderate Syrian forces, like the Kurds on the ground, to fight to replace the Assad regime.

Both my constituents and the Nation's top military advisers know that doing so is the only way to bring any long-term stability to Syria.

□ 1030

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY'S ACCESS TO WATER

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. COSTA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about one of the most important issues facing the San Joaquin Valley, and that is the access to water.

California has received well-above-average rainfall during the months of December and January. But for the past several weeks, we have seen dry conditions, once again, come back.

For the last several weeks I have tried to speak on behalf of the need to make changes so that we can urge the Federal agencies to pump water at maximum levels that are allowed under the biological opinions, so that we could bring more water to the San Joaquin Valley and the farms located south of the delta.

It is welcome news that they are pumping at more robust levels, and it is my hope that we will continue to pump at maximum levels when allowable, especially because these El Nino conditions that we have had in December and January are now fading, sadly.

With the possibility of California's rainy and snow seasons coming to an end, and with much less precipitation than we had hoped for, we must take advantage of every drop of precious water that is in the system.

We need a comprehensive plan to fix California's broken water system that provides short-term operational flexibility and, at the same time, increases the State's long-term drought resiliency that will provide real water reliability and actually recovers species that have been listed in the Sacramento, San Joaquin Delta.

It is time to address these issues that are impacting these species in the delta and implement a plan to recover them so that we can stop operating the water system primarily with the blunt tools of the Endangered Species Act that clearly aren't working. They are not working because the species are not recovering.

Studies have indicated that on some rivers feeding into the delta, over 98 percent of the juvenile salmon are eaten by invasive species like the striped bass that aren't even native to California.

Despite this knowledge and the clear protections provided listed species by the Endangered Species Act, the administration has established a goal to double the amount of striped bass in California.

It should not be the policy of the United States to increase the populations of invasive species that prey on native salmon in California. I don't get it. This makes absolutely no sense and needs to be corrected.

We should be implementing a predator control program which, I might add, is supported by the Salmon Fisheries Institute. As a matter of fact, they have got over 31 programs on predator control that they would like to implement. They can't implement one of them.

We should be focusing on trying to make a difference, and that is why I am proud to be a cosponsor of Representative JEFF DENHAM's legislation, the Save Our Salmon Act.

The Save Our Salmon Act, by Congressman DENHAM, would eliminate the policy of doubling striped bass populations in the delta, a policy which has very serious negative impacts to our native salmon species and causes tremendous harm to the farm communities in the San Joaquin Valley.

We have to determine if California is going to operate with a broken system or if Congress, the administration, and the State can come together with Federal and State legislation to provide meaningful solutions to fix our broken water system for the future, for the 21st century.

Will we allow communities to dry up and blow away, as some of my colleagues, I believe, sometimes infer?

Or will we come together and craft a solution that can improve conditions for everyone across the State, while focusing on drought recovery for those

who have been most affected in areas that I represent?

I am talking about farm workers. I am talking about farmers. I am talking about farm communities that put food every night on America's dinner table. I will continue to believe that we still can come together if we focus on achievable solutions.

After years of moving more and more water through the delta in an attempt to halt species decline, we haven't actually recovered any of these species. It is high time, I believe, to try something new.

I remain committed to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to craft solutions that increase California's drought resiliency and provide water to the communities who have been most impacted by the recent drought because, after all, this is about security. It is about job security, it is about economic security, it is about the future security of our valley and the State of California.

We must fix California's broken water system for the short term and the long term. Time is of the essence, and every day of delay only results in losses of these vital water supplies.

SEVENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MILLER-RAFFAELE VFW POST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the 70th anniversary of the Miller-Raffaele VFW Post 6221 in Emporium, Cameron County, located in the Pennsylvania Fifth Congressional District.

The post is named after two sets of brothers who answered the call to defend the United States of America in World War II, Jack and Harry Miller, along with Sam and Frank Raffaele.

Jack and Harry were killed within 1 month of each other in 1944. Sadly, Sam and Frank also made the ultimate sacrifice on the same day, yet miles apart from one another, also in 1944.

After the war ended, the community welcomed back the surviving men and women who formed the Miller-Raffaele Post 6221, which was officially opened on March 5, 1946.

Mr. Speaker, we owe so much to the members of our Nation's Armed Forces, and especially to those members of the Greatest Generation who traveled to places such as Europe and Asia to fight tyranny.

I am proud to salute the members of the Emporium VFW on this important anniversary, and I wish them the best of success in the future.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 404TH MANEUVER ENHANCEMENT BRIGADE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAMALFA). The Chair recognizes the

gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LAHOOD) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAHOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to formally congratulate the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade from Normal, Illinois, for receiving the Reserve Family Readiness Award from the Department of Defense at the Pentagon last Friday.

This award is bestowed on the top unit in each Reserve component for their outstanding programs that support unit missions and family readiness.

The 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, under Unit Commander, Captain Jera Muder, has more than 2,000 soldiers in various functional units, from engineering to military police, to support units.

These family readiness support programs allow our soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and guardsmen to serve throughout the world with peace of mind, knowing that their home front is safe.

This is a prestigious title, and it makes me proud and Illinois proud that these remarkable men and women call central Illinois home.

Today we applaud their families for the sacrifices they make so their soldiers can defend our country abroad, and we congratulate them on this well-deserved award.

To those in our Armed Forces keeping our homes and families safe, thank you. And to the fathers, mothers, wives, husbands, and children behind our troops, you also deserve our gratitude for your ongoing sacrifice and bravery.

KLAMATH RIVER DAM REMOVAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the Natural Resources Committee, I requested and demanded that the Interior Department explain its involvement in creating what appears to be a shell corporation, which it calls a non-Federal entity, which would work to remove dams on the Klamath River in northern California and southern Oregon, this without any authorization from Congress.

Interior officials refused to answer in committee whether they will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act or even explain why stakeholders are required at these meetings to sign non-disclosure agreements before learning how they will be affected by the actions at these secret meetings.

They don't like having them called secret meetings. They have other euphemisms, such as a private conversation, what have you. They are even organizing bylaws for an incoming board at these meetings.

Mr. Speaker, the very idea that Federal and State government employees are involved in a project designed explicitly to avoid open government,